

Putnam County Sheriff's Department Complaint

1 message

Terry Hembree <terry.hembree@gmail.com>
To: "janessa@tacp.org" <janessa@tacp.org>

Sun, Jul 30, 2023 at 11:48 PM

I am writing to file a formal complaint regarding a serious concern with the Putnam County Sheriff's Department, which obtained accreditation with your esteemed agency in 2018. As a former employee of the Putnam County Sheriff's Department, I worked diligently from 2014 until my retirement in 2019, actively participating in the implementation of policies that aimed to meet the high standards required by your accreditation.

My primary cause for concern revolves around Sheriff Eddie Farris, who expressed his desire for accreditation to his command staff; however, I have since learned that Sheriff Farris has failed to adhere to the accreditation standards once granted. I strongly believe that Sheriff Farris's motivation for seeking accreditation was purely for political reasons, rather than a genuine commitment to the accreditation process and the betterment of the department.

After I left the department, I became aware of numerous instances of non-compliance by Sheriff Farris with the established accreditation standards. One glaring example pertains to the promotion process, where Sheriff Farris has refused to follow the guidelines outlined in General Order 1002.4. This process mandates that employees be notified of promotional opportunities through emails and Sign-Up Sheets. However, it has come to my attention that Sign-Up Sheets contained the names of individuals who were no longer employed or already held the positions they were applying for, and no email notifications were being sent to eligible employees. Consequently, Sheriff Farris has made discriminatory promotions that contradict the fair and unbiased promotion process as mandated by the General Order.

Furthermore, Sheriff Farris has also violated the process of General Order 803, which pertains to requests for public records and the Tennessee Public Records Act. I personally experienced this violation when I requested records and received a bill that was not in compliance with the Sheriff's Department General Order or the Tennessee Public Records Act. I also requested the personnel file of a sheriff's department employee, who was not certified as a law enforcement officer in Tennessee under the Tennessee Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission. After requesting the employee's personnel file, this led to an incident where the employee began making inquiries to another employee, specifically an employee assigned to the Warrants Division. He inquired if I had interfered with the service of a warrant issued for my daughter.

First of all, I had no knowledge that a warrant had been issued for my daughter, and I later found that it was actually a summons. When I say I later found out, I mean that I found out after I had requested the employee's personnel file.

Now, keep in mind, I was no longer employed with the Sheriff's Department when I requested the employee's personnel file. I had been retired for over 3 years. I made the request in accordance with the Tennessee Public Records Act. I learned after searching public court records that my daughter's alleged warrant was actually a summons pertaining to a low-level misdemeanor and was dismissed in court. Furthermore, it involved an incident that occurred more than five years ago. There would have been no reason for this employee to make inquiries about this summons unless he was looking for something to use against me in retaliation for his requesting his personnel file.

The reason this is relevant is that there was another incident prior to requesting the personnel file where I informed the Sheriff's Department through their attorney that they violated POST Rule 1110.02.04 requiring officers who resign while under criminal investigation to be reported to POST. There was a deputy under criminal investigation by the district attorney's office, and the Sheriff's Department allowed him to resign in good standing and did not report the information to POST. After I brought this to their attention, I received an anonymous letter in the mail that appeared to be related to the deputy who was under investigation. The letter began addressing me as "FORMER MAJOR", which was my rank when I retired from the Sheriff's Department and the letter continued with defamatory accusations about me seeking a sexual relationship with the anonymous writer, who signed the letter with the initials KJ. These were the initials of the deputy who resigned. I can only assume that whoever wrote the letter wanted me to believe that it was written by this deputy, who was no longer with the Sheriff's Department and would have no knowledge about my letter regarding the POST rule violation.

Other information in the anonymous letter was a defamatory statement about my wife having a mugshot from her arrest in South Carolina. An interesting aspect of the letter was that it was typewritten on white copy paper in all caps, which is a common trait among law enforcement officers. The envelope was white with my name and address handwritten in pink ink. This is important because the employee assigned to the Warrants Division who was asked about my daughter's alleged warrant, saw an envelope handwritten in pink ink in the outgoing mail at the Putnam County Sheriff's Department.

Additionally, prior to requesting the personnel file of the employee who inquired about my daughter's warrant, someone had made a post on social media about me covering up for my daughter's crimes, and they posted a photo from my wife's South Carolina driver's license purporting it to be a mugshot from her arrest. The post was obviously made by someone who is connected to the anonymous letter.

Incidentally, the post was also made the same day that a letter I had written to the editor of the local newspaper criticizing the Sheriff's Department was published. The post was obviously in retaliation for my letter to the editor. I had written a previous letter to the editor criticizing the Sheriff's Department for creating a secret "Ban List" banning people from entering the public lobby of the Sheriff's Department in violation of the First Amendment. The people included on the "Ban List" had also been critical of the Sheriff's Department with some making public statements on social media. I actually received an email from the editor of the newspaper reporting that Sheriff Farris had called and complained about my letter being published, which again is a violation of the

First Amendment., In addition, Sheriff Farris has been sued in the U.S. District Court of Middle Tennessee for not allowing public comments on the Sheriff's Department's social media accounts.

I have been targeted for more than a year with harassing social media posts, fake Facebook accounts with defamatory information about me and my wife, and discriminatory practices when I request records from the Sheriff's Department.

I am concerned that whoever is involved in these malicious acts is connected to a law enforcement agency or employed as a law enforcement officer. The information posted on social media about me covering for my daughter's crime concerned me, especially after I learned that an employee of the Sheriff's Department made an inquiry about my daughter after I requested the employee's personnel file. It made me wonder if the incidents were connected. I also considered the distribution of my wife's purported driver's license photo from another state, falsely labeling it as a mugshot from an arrest. The gravity of this incident raises concerns over the potential misuse of law enforcement authorization to access private information in violation of the Driver's Privacy Protection Act (DPPA) of 1994.

I brought this matter to the attention of Sheriff Farris in the form of an official complaint and request for an internal investigation. He has refused to conduct an internal investigation and cited the reason for his denial as a lack of "standing". General Order 1010.4 clearly states that all requests for investigations will be taken seriously. There is no mention of legal standing or other qualifications to initiate an investigation. This blatant disregard for his own department's policies further highlights Sheriff Farris's non-compliance with the accreditation standards upheld by the Tennessee Law Enforcement Accreditation Program.

Considering these numerous instances of non-compliance, I firmly believe that Sheriff Farris and the Putnam County Sheriff's Department are in breach of the standards set forth by the Tennessee Law Enforcement Accreditation Program. In light of this, I request that a thorough investigation be launched into these matters, and I urge your esteemed agency to suspend or revoke the accreditation of the Putnam County Sheriff's Department pending the outcome of the investigation.

I trust that the Tennessee Law Enforcement Accreditation Program will take this complaint seriously and act promptly to ensure the integrity of the accreditation process and the expectations of the community served by the Putnam County Sheriff's Department. I am willing to cooperate fully with any further inquiries related to this matter.

Thank you for your attention to this serious issue. I look forward to receiving confirmation of the receipt of this complaint and updates on the investigation process.

Sincerely,

Terry Hembree

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